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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004344

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CENTCOM FOR POLAD

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SUBJECT: AMRE MUSA AND IRAQIS THINKING OF NOVEMBER MEETING
ON NATIONAL ACCORD

REF: BAGHDAD

Classified By: PolCouns Robert Ford, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: Arab League Secretary General Amre Musa told Charge October 21 evening that he hopes to hold an initial conference in Cairo in mid-November for Iraqi political factions aimed at facilitating national reconciliation. This initial meeting should lead to a larger meeting in Baghdad. These meetings would include hard-line Sunni Arab rejectionists, such as the Muslim Ulema Council and Arab nationalists. Musa accepted Charge's point that these meetings should encourage broader participation in the political process but not signal a return of another Sunni Arab ruling clique. Foreign Minister Zebari told Charge later October 21 that the idea of a national political conference brokered by the Arab League was fine if limited to Iraqi political groups, and include neither the Iraqi Government nor foreign observers. End Summary.

MUSA CONFIDENT OF HIS CONFERENCE IDEA

2. (C) Saying he saw a better mood among the Iraqi political forces, Arab League Secretary General Amre Musa is moving ahead with two conferences to generate an Arab League-brokered national "accord." Musa told Charge the evening of October 21 that the Arab League in Cairo would host an initial meeting would be held in mid-November among key Iraqi political factions. A larger meeting would follow among all the political forces. Musa readily agreed with Charge's point that the larger conference would need to be in Baghdad.

SUNNI HARD-LINERS SOFTENING ?

3. (C) Amre Musa said he found even hard-line Sunni Arab rejectionists, like Shaykh Harith ad-Dhari from the Muslim Ulema Council, and Jawad al-Khalisi from the Founding Conference ('mu'tamar at-ta'seesi) as well as Arab nationalists like Subhi Abdel Hamid would be willing to participate in a broad meeting. He said Dhari still has a list of objections to policies underway in Iraq ("You know them," he stated.) Dhari has agreed not to insist on preconditions for the Ulema Council's participation. Musa was certain that these heretofore rejectionists would join in the December national elections if they received the right encouragement.

4. (C) Charge said the Arab League initiative would be useful if it encouraged all Iraqis to participate in the next elections. He cautioned that the conference was not the place for Dhari to try to negotiate the withdrawal of Coalition forces; the Iraqi Government should be responsible for those discussions. Charge urged Musa to stay on the theme he had used at the October 21 iftar: the "old Iraq" is gone and the "new Iraq" would stay and merited support. The Arab League initiative must be clearly understood not to be aiming for the return of a Sunni Arab clique to power; rather it should be about Sunni Arabs having a share of power by participating in the political process. Charge also urged Musa to open an Arab League office, and Musa said he would do so.

FOREIGN MINISTER WANTS IRAQI POLITICIANS ONLY

5. (C) Separately, Foreign Minister Zebari told Charge that Musa's meetings had the right tone. He said he was recommending that the Arab League not invite Iraqi Government officials per se. Instead since these meetings were intended to cement an accord among political forces, he told Musa to invite the political groups in the Iraqi National Assembly, and groups from outside the Assembly. Zebari said he was also discouraging Musa from the idea of inviting foreign observers from neighboring states, the UN

and the Coalition. Zebari speculated that the larger conference would take place in January around the same time as the new government is formed.

16. (C) Musa asked Charge about the Mehliis report which he had not seen. Charge said the report's contents were very serious and pledged to get Musa a copy while he was still in Baghdad.

Comment

17. (C) At the iftar hosted by the MFA October 21 we still heard suspicions about Musa and his mission. A Kurdish politician and cabinet member muttered sourly that he didn't trust Musa who, he claimed, had always been too close to Saddam. A staffer with Shia Islamist Abdel Mehdi noted that Musa's post-meal speech called for a "united, free and prosperous" Iraq without mentioning the word "democratic." This staffer noted that at least Musa had taken the point that many Iraqi political groups in power don't believe in national reconciliation. They will not sit with Baathists and terrorists. Musa has found that the term "accord" sells better in Baghdad. Musa on October 22 will be in Najaf trying to sell his conference idea to Ayatollah Sistani and Muqtada as-Sadr before heading to Kurdistan later in the day.
Satterfield